

By: Watson

S.B. No. 1997

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to establishing a pilot program for professional support service provider services for persons who are deaf-blind.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 81.001, Human Resources Code, is amended by adding Subsection (6) to read as follows:

(6) "Support service provider" means a person who is specially trained to enable persons who are deaf-blind to access their environments and make informed decisions by providing visual and environmental information, sighted guide services, and communication accessibility in the person's preferred language and communication mode. Preferred communication modes include auditory amplification with a personal FM system, visible Signed English, visible American Sign Language, or tactile sign language. A support service provider does not provide personal care, run errands alone for, or make decisions for a person who is deaf-blind, teach or instruct a person who is deaf-blind, or interpret for a person who is deaf-blind in formal settings, such as medical, legal, or business appointments.

SECTION 2. Chapter 81, Human Resources Code, is amended by adding Section 81.002 to read as follows:

Sec. 81.022. Support Service Provider Program Pilot. (a) Out of funds provided for this program, the Department shall develop a pilot program for the provision of support service

1 providers for persons who are deaf-blind.

2 (b) This pilot shall be located in two counties in the State  
3 where a significant deaf-blind population resides.

4 (c) The Department has the authority to develop rules to:

5 (1) administer the pilot program in a manner that  
6 balances maximum efficiency, serving the most people as possible,  
7 and how to best serve the deaf-blind community; and

8 (2) ensure those receiving compensation for service as  
9 a support service provider have a proper level of training.

10 (d) The Department shall establish a pay rate for the  
11 support service providers that utilizes a tiered wage scale based  
12 on a support service provider's:

13 (1) level of training;

14 (2) fluency in the deaf-blind person's preferred  
15 communication mode; and

16 (3) other skills in deaf-blind communication  
17 modalities.

18 (e) The agency shall begin planning for the implementation  
19 of this pilot during the year proceeding the starting date.

20 (f) This pilot is to begin September 1, 2018.

21 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2017.